

Statement Included

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**KENNEDY HOLDS SENATE HEARING TO IMPLEMENT AGENDA FOR
HURRICANE KATRINA VICTIMS**

Washington, D.C.—Today, Senator Edward M. Kennedy and Senator Mike Enzi held a hearing of the Senate Help committee with relief organizations working to provide support to Hurricane Katrina victims. Outside witnesses, including the Dr. Diane Roussel, the Superintendent of Jefferson Parish Public Schools in New Orleans, participated to help formulate a bipartisan plan on the immediate and long-term needs resulting from Hurricane Katrina and the following relief efforts. Other witnesses, such as Dr. Jennifer Leaning of Harvard School of Public Health, shared their experiences dealing with the aftermath of other disasters.

“We have witnessed a natural disaster turned into a national catastrophe by a botched and inadequate response, despite the bravery and sacrifice of relief workers, rescue personnel, and the hurricane survivors themselves.” Senator Kennedy said. “Our promise to those who have survived the hurricane should not simply be to turn back the clock a month or two -- it should be to fulfill the true promise of the American Dream by committing ourselves to better health, better education and better job opportunities for them, and for all Americans”

On Tuesday, as the first step, dozens of representatives from nationwide relief organizations met with Kennedy and Enzi and relayed their experiences and recommendations for meeting the challenge of providing support services to a region severely hit with health care, education, economic and structural devastation.

Senator Kennedy has already put forth proposals to ensure that students don't miss a year of school, survivors receive much needed health care, and families receive economic assistance during this time of great tragedy. Some of these ideas became a part of Democratic Caucus agenda and others will become part of the HELP Committee's plan.

Below is Senator Kennedy's remarks and the witness list from today's hearings.

**STATEMENT OF SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY
HEARING ON HURRICANE KATRINA
SEPTEMBER 8, 2005**

Thank you, Senator Enzi, for holding today's important hearing on assisting those affected by Hurricane Katrina, and thank you also to our distinguished witnesses for their expertise and thoughtful recommendations.

Some images are so searing they are burned into our memories forever. None of us will ever forget the pictures we have seen from the Gulf Coast in recent days.

We have seen images of despair among those who were abandoned in a nation of great wealth -- and of hope reborn in the faces of families reunited after surviving a calamity of Biblical proportions. We have seen great heroism too, not only in the spectacular images of rescues by helicopter, but in the quiet courage of neighbors who helped neighbors survive the howling winds and rising waters.

We have seen darker images too - images we thought we'd never see in America. The elderly, the disabled, and the sick left to die. Families split apart. And American citizens trapped without food, sanitation or adequate water in makeshift shelters.

In short, we have witnessed a natural disaster turned into a national catastrophe by a botched and inadequate response, despite the bravery and sacrifice of relief workers, rescue personnel, and the hurricane survivors themselves.

Most of all, these indelible images remind us that we are all part of the American family. When members of that family are in need, in want, and in fear, we all have a duty to make our family whole once more.

All of us, I am sure, have been heartened by the thousands of volunteers who have honored their commitment to the American family by giving their time and their skills to healing the injured, repairing schools, counseling the grieving, and aiding the survivors in finding new hope.

In my own state of Massachusetts, health professionals, educators, labor unions, businesses, and countless individual citizens have answered the call. Eighteen major hospitals are sending volunteer teams or supplies to the affected area. More than 30 colleges and universities in Massachusetts will enroll students impacted by hurricane Katrina, offering housing and tuition assistance.

Congress has a major responsibility to help the survivors of this terrible ordeal rebuild their communities and their lives. Today's hearing is an important part of meeting that responsibility. The distinguished individuals seated around this table today, and the organizations they represent, have rolled up their sleeves to help those most in need along the Gulf Coast. They have the vision to see what must be done, and the experience to know how to get it done.

As we speak, thousands of Americans displaced from their homes are at risk of epidemics - yet only three working hospitals remain in Southeast Louisiana. Thousands more face the silent battles of coping with bereavement and catastrophe. We must restore shattered hospitals, assure access to health care including mental health care, and build communities so that hurricane survivors can live with dignity and hope in homes of their own.

135,000 students in Louisiana alone have been displaced from their schools. Hundreds of schools in Mississippi have been damaged or destroyed. Student's lives have been disrupted and their semester interrupted. Fortunately, superintendents and principals across the country have reached out to students displaced by this disaster to welcome them into their classrooms. It's our turn in Congress to reach out and provide the resources needed for schools to take these students in, while also helping to rebuild educational institutions devastated by Katrina.

We cannot afford to neglect the impact of this disaster on our nation's youngest children. Many of the thousands of children and families in the Gulf region most seriously impacted by this storm were already among the most neglected and vulnerable in our nation, devastated by the impact of poverty. It's time for Congress to act to help those young children and their families cope with the effects of trauma, and build a stronger foundation for their future.

Up to one million Americans will be left jobless in this tragic storm. The unemployment rate in the Gulf Coast region is expected to increase to 25 percent or higher. Experts estimate that many of the affected workers will be unemployed for nine months or more.

These are staggering figures. And they have national implications. Standard & Poors says that the likelihood of another recession has doubled and is now more than 25 percent.

These families have lost absolutely everything, and they need a source of income while they try to get back on their feet and begin looking for new employment. This process will undoubtedly take time. Many of these people have more basic needs - such as finding shelter or finding lost family members - that must be met before they can focus on finding work.

In addition, while communities across the country have generously opened their doors and their hearts to Katrina victims, the local economies in these areas do not necessarily have the capacity to accommodate the influx of workers that have arrived.

Families' needs are immediate and significant. Employers and state governments in hurricane-ravaged states cannot bear the burden of compensating the huge numbers of workers that are now jobless through their state unemployment compensation systems. We need a comprehensive federal response that makes disaster unemployment assistance available to every worker left jobless by this tragedy, and this federal assistance must provide a meaningful benefit that will meet the basic needs of unemployed workers and their families as they begin their long road to recovery.

We must also take steps to see that we are better prepared for future calamities, whether from floods, earthquakes or terrorist attacks. In the days and weeks to come, we will have much to learn that will be helpful in this task.

But an essential part of building for the future is a clear-eyed assessment of the mistakes made in the response to Hurricane Katrina. If we fail to recognize and admit mistakes, they are sure to be repeated.

But our task for today is to learn from our distinguished panelists how best to protect the health of those affected by the hurricane, and see that they can rebuild their lives.

What should be our measure of success?

Some would think it enough to return the survivors to the lives they knew before the flooding - but we should aim higher. For many of the survivors, the life they knew before the storm was one of ill health, inadequate education, and opportunity denied. The nation had failed them long before Katrina hit.

Our promise to those who have survived the hurricane should not simply be to turn back the clock a month or two -- it should be to fulfill the true promise of the American Dream by committing ourselves to better health, better education and better job opportunities for them, and for all Americans.

HURRICANE KATRINA ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

- 1. Michael Casserly, Great City Schools**
- 2. Dr. Leonard Merrell, Superintendent of Katy Independent School District**
- 3. Dr. Diane Roussel, Superintendent of Jefferson Parish School District**
- 4. Alabama Education Department Task Force**
Dr. Eddie Johnson, Deputy Superintendent
Feagin Johnson, Assistant Superintendent
Craig Pouncy, Assistant Superintendent
Maggie Rivers, Director Federal Programs
Perry Taylor, School Architect
Perry Fulton, Child Nutrition
- 5. Dr. Jennifer Leaning, Professor of the Practice of International Health, Harvard School of Public Health**

- 6. Lisa Cox, Assistant Director for Federal Affairs, National Association of Community Health Centers**
- 7. Charlie Ware, Chairman, Wyoming Workforce Development Council**
- 8. Mark Shriver, Vice-President and Managing Director, Save the Children**
- 9. Kenneth Weigand , Vice-President for Human Resources, Walgreen's**
- 10. Joseph E. Savoi, Louisiana Commissioner of Higher Education**
- 11. Kathleen Smith, President, Education Finance Council**
- 12. Major Marilyn White, National Consultant on Adult Ministries, Salvation Army**
- 13. Maurice Emsellem, Public Policy Director, National Employment Law Project**

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